



Committee on Finance and the Northampton City Council

*Councilor Marianne LaBarge
Councilor Rachel Maiore
Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III
Councilor Jim Nash*

Virtual Meeting
Meeting Date: January 12, 2022
Time: 5 p.m.

1. **Meeting Called To Order:** At 5:05 p.m. Acting Chair Marianne LaBarge called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were committee members Councilor Marianne LaBarge (Acting Chair), Councilor Rachel Maiore, Councilor Stanley W. Moulton, III and Councilor Jim Nash.
3. **Announcement of Audio/Video Recording**
Councilor LaBarge announced that the meeting was being audio and video recorded.
4. **Election of Chair/Vice Chair**
Councilor LaBarge opened the floor to nominations for chair.

Councilor Nash nominated Councilor Maiore. Councilor Moulton seconded.

There being no further nominations, Councilor LaBarge closed the nominations.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote. Councilor Maiore was elected chair by acclamation.

Councilor Maiore opened the floor to nominations for vice chair. **Councilor Nash nominated Councilor LaBarge. Councilor Moulton seconded.**

There being no further nominations, Councilor Maiore closed nominations.

As council president, he is not seeking leadership roles on the committees he serves on since he thinks it's important that other councilors step forward as leaders, Councilor Nash related. He appreciates the work he and Councilor Maiore have done together on plastic reduction and hopes to continue that work and appreciates her comment at the council's organizational meeting that they are the most diverse council the city has ever had. In that spirit, he wanted to nominate her as chair today.

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In the same vein, he wanted to recognize Councilor LaBarge. She is the longest-standing member of council now and, he's pretty sure, the longest-serving woman ever. He said he appreciated her work in the past, citing their work together on the resolution for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and TPS (Temporary Protected Status) as some of the most personally moving accomplishments they've shared.

She really enjoys the Finance Committee and has been on it for quite a long time, Councilor LaBarge said. It is seriously one of the biggest committees that there is. People in the city of Northampton care about where their dollars are being spent. Being on council for 20 years since 1998, she hears people asking why their money is going here or there. She is very honored to take the vice chair position because she finds this to be a very high priority as a city councilor. She thanked Councilor Nash for the nomination.

Councilor Maire expressed appreciation for Councilor Nash's willingness to serve as a mentor of junior councilors. She appreciates Councilor LaBarge as one of the most independent thinkers on council who has the ability to ask tough questions, she added.

Councilor Maire called the nomination to a vote, and **the election of Councilor LaBarge as vice chair was unanimously approved 4:0 by roll call vote.**

5. Minutes of December 16, 2021

Councilor Nash moved to approve the minutes of December 16, 2021. Councilor LaBarge seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

6. Set Meeting Schedule For 2020 – 2021

Councilor Moulton expressed his understanding that it is necessary to sync Finance Committee meetings in between full city council meetings so they are able to handle referred financial orders in a timely way.

Councilor Nash proposed developing an overall schedule for meeting the Wednesday following the council meeting at 5 p.m. There will be a lot of scheduled meetings but he imagines they won't be using many of them since it will only be necessary to meet when items are referred. The scheduled meeting will not be utilized if there is no referral.

Councilor Maire asked about having the regular meeting on a day other than Wednesday, such as Monday or Tuesday. However, it was noted that other council subcommittees meet on Mondays (City Services, Legislative Matters, etc.), so Mondays would present possible conflicts.

Councilor Nash said he would be comfortable just setting the date of the next meeting now and putting scheduling on the agenda for discussion again. Members reached the consensus to hold the next meeting Tuesday, January 25, 2022 @ 5 p.m. [Note: Since there were no financial orders referred at the January 20, 2022 City Council meeting, the next meeting was actually February 8, 2022 @ 5 p.m.]

Members noted that it would be evident at the end of each council meeting if a Finance Committee meeting the next week would be required. Members may sometimes have their own agenda items to discuss, too.

Councilor Moulton said he would like to reflect on and raise a question about the role of this brave new committee. He looked at Finance Committee members' role as laid out in the rules. They react to a lot of things but do have jurisdiction over financial matters. He has heard a lot over the last two years about the relative balance of power between the mayor and the council and he knows that the council reacts to a lot of financial matters. He wonders if there is a role for the Finance Committee to be more proactive in coming
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up with guidelines or priorities that could be sent as an advisory to the mayor as she is constructing the budget. Particularly with a new mayor and a Finance Committee that has taken on a new role he thought this would be a good time to think about that. He wanted to suggest that they think about whether they could be a bit more proactive in helping to shape the budget.

Both Councilor LaBarge and Councilor Maiore expressed enthusiasm for this idea, with Councilor Maiore saying she thinks it's wonderful and Councilor LaBarge pronouncing it 'an excellent idea.' She has been a fan of participatory budgeting in other communities, Councilor Maiore said, and she likes the proactive approach instead of waiting to the other end and critiquing the mayor's budget. It is kind of a service to the mayor, she suggested.

Regarding the balance of power, she has heard what Councilor Moulton is saying about councilors losing their power from many people in the city, Councilor LaBarge observed. On the Ordinance Review Committee one of the members suggested taking a look at the charter with regard to the balance of power.

Councilor Moulton said he thinks this is a way without any specific change to the charter that the council can push the envelope a little bit in terms of what powers they have.

As council president, he is meeting with the mayor tomorrow with the thought in mind of how to establish communication between the council, himself and the mayor's office, Councilor Nash advised. They have a new mayor, and he thinks this mayor will have a different way of doing things than the previous mayor. The mayor has a lot of discretion in the way he/she relates to councilors and the public. He's heard in the past the idea of the public also being more involved a little earlier in budget aspirations. He will bring this up with the mayor tomorrow and let her know there is interest on the part of this committee and the council in having a little more discussion prior to the budget hearing. He hasn't discussed it with Mayor Sciarra, but his sense is that she may want to change the process a little bit or dramatically. Beyond just the budget, he is hoping to clarify the protocols for communication in general with the council and the public within the next few weeks, he indicated.

He suggested having a discussion of the scope and responsibilities of the Finance Committee as an agenda item on the next agenda.

7. Financial Orders

None.

8. New Business

-Reserved for topics that the Chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.

None.

9. Adjourn: There being no further business, Councilor Nash moved to adjourn. Councilor Thorpe seconded. The motion carried on a voice vote of 4 Yes, 0 No. The meeting adjourned at 5:34 p.m.

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